

DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, August 18, 2000

From My Perspective

By Ken Patterson

What a great week for me! I was able to visit each of the seven regions to review our fiscal year 2000 outcomes with DCFS staff. Nearly all of the outcomes we track either improved or maintained their positive trend. We have also been able to compare Utah's outcomes with the national outcomes published by the U.S. Children's Bureau. This comparison data shows that we are protecting children. It also shows that we are attaining permanency for children either through reuniting or adopting children significantly faster than the national averages. If you were unable to attend one of the regional meetings please look for the data attachment to next week's update.

Paul Vincent, The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group Director, was able to attend five of the seven meetings and provided great feedback about our initial performance in the Qualitative Case Review process. He also gave suggestions for improving our performance in the next go-round.

DCFS Board Chair, Becky Oakley, attended six of the seven meetings and presented the national comparison data. Both Paul and Becky expressed thanks for the thoughtful and thorough preparation of each region as they presented the three best outcomes and the three most challenging outcomes. Each region also presented on their learning and observations from the first round of Qualitative Case Reviews.

Thank you regions for being great hosts and working hard to create positive outcomes!

Proposed Legislation on Safe Relinquishment of a Newborn

By Richard Anderson

Infants found in dumpsters have become a reason for a national response to what seems to be a growing problem. In our own state we have had a few circumstances come to light where infants have been abandoned to a fatal outcome. In some instances abandoned infants have been found in time to save their lives.

Representative Patrice Arent is sponsoring a bill that would allow the biological mother of a newborn to take the infant to a fire station or emergency room and anonymously leave the infant. Fire stations were selected because many communities do not have hospitals but they do have fire stations. In addition, these two facilities have 24-hour medically trained staff available to care for the infant. DCFS would be contacted to take custody of the infant and make an adoptive placement. Rep. Arent is looking for an avenue for the mother who wants total anonymity and who may look to the abandonment option that could be fatal for the newborn to have an alternative option.

There are a few unanswered legal questions, but for the most part, the statutes currently in place could cover such a "safe relinquishment." The intent of the mother would be clearly to provide a safe place for her child. In this respect this could be a relinquishment as opposed to abandonment.

In speaking with Rep. Arent, she was clear that she wants to provide total anonymity, if this is what the mother wants. In situations where the mother may be willing to provide medical history or anything that might help, the process could allow her to do so. But if the mother wanted merely to walk in to one of the two facilities and set the baby in a crib or carrier of some kind and walk away, knowing that care would be given, this would be acceptable. The current proposal states that this must be done in the first three days of the infant's life.

I was asked to present a supportive position on this proposed legislation. DCFS has six abandoned infants showing on SAFE for the past four years. The number is not large, but we know from the news that there have been too many that have not come to our attention. For the pregnant mother who wants absolutely no one to know that she delivered a baby, there needs to be a better solution. Rep. Arent needs to be applauded for beginning this discussion and proposing such a bill this year. Our support comes from the strong position of DCFS that infants are to be kept safe and that people often just need better options.

Salt Lake Region's Meth Lab Child Welfare Practice Receives National Recognition

By Abel Ortiz

The Department of Justice held its Second Annual Conference on Methamphetamine Initiatives from August 13 through 15, 2000 in Arlington, Virginia. The Salt Lake Meth Lab Initiative was selected as one of the best initiatives in the nation. The Salt Lake initiative was selected because of the team approach to Meth lab clean-ups, which includes special attention to children found in homes where Meth labs are located. The Salt Lake Police Department and the Salt Lake Region have teamed with over 20 other agencies to create one of the nation's most comprehensive Meth lab clean-up projects in the nation.

Lisa Jorgensen, a CPS worker in Salt Lake, is the Region's liaison to the initiative. She has received special training in Meth lab investigations and is on-call 24 hours a day for Meth lab investigations. Lisa has identified that many of the children found in Meth lab investigations have no prior involvement with DCFS, and the majority of children removed from Meth lab homes are placed in kinship care rather than foster care.

The Christmas Box House staff, shelter parents, the Health Care teams, and Primary Children's Hospital Child Protection Team have also received special training to work with children removed from Meth lab homes. The West Valley Police Department and Midvale Police Department also attended the conference and will be looking to team with DCFS to develop their own initiatives.

To Make Your Life Easier: Using SAFE Optimally

By Bob Lewis

When a child removal has occurred, the transition in SAFE from CPS to SCR is very smooth and straightforward if these procedures are followed in a timely manner:

1. Enter removal and placement information (including health history, psychosocial, and educational data) into the CPS case within two to three days of the removal;
2. Then open the SCF case as soon as possible after the court gives temporary custody and the entry in #1 is made, and well before the time the CPS case is to be closed.

When procedures are set up to follow these steps, all of the data concerning the child is available to those who may need it. Action items generate and are known early. Workers will not run into barriers for completing their assigned work because something that should have been entered previously (placement, purchase service authorization, SCF case creation, etc.) was not completed.

Spring/Summer 2000 Issue of ADVOCASEY

By Carol Miller

The following information was received from the Casey Foundation, which may be of interest to you.

The Casey Foundation web site has just added the complete Spring/Summer 2000 issue of ADVOCASEY, which features four articles on effective approaches to improving health care in low-income communities:

- Inconspicuous Consumption: Treating Latent TB Infection in Seattle
- Health Care for All: Medicaid and CHIP Outreach in New Orleans
- The Capacity to Heal: The Rebirth of a Community Health Center in Richmond
- Walking the Plain Talk: Protecting Sexually Active Teens in Atlanta, New Orleans, and San Diego.

"Casey Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson introduces the issue with a commentary entitled, 'The Health of Families and Communities.'

"The Spring/Summer 2000 issue of ADVOCASEY is available at:
<http://www.aecf.org/publications/advocasey/summer2000/>."